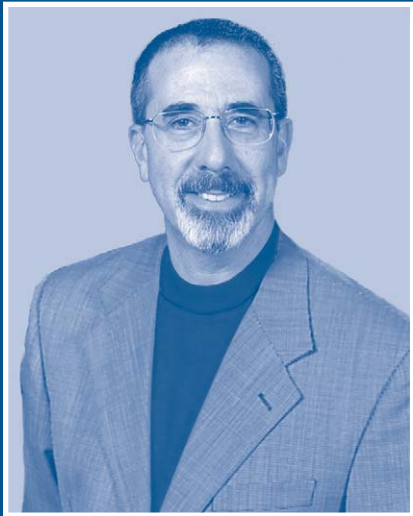


# State Senator Burton Leland

## Serving the People in the 5th District



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## Senate Democrats Develop Programs to Help Outsourced Workers

This past month, Senate Democrats announced a series of initiatives to discourage further outsourcing of Michigan jobs and help outsourced workers and their families cope with the results of their jobs being shipped overseas. Our state has been disproportionately affected by the outsourcing of American jobs, and this package offers both financial assistance and access to training opportunities for workers who have lost their jobs.

One of the main packages is called Help Outsourced Workers (HOW) to Improve Michigan's Economy. Highlights include:

**Loan Insurance:** Creating a loan protection program to help provide emergency assistance with home and car loan payments. This would allow workers to keep their homes and meet basic necessity financial obligations while they get back on their feet.

**Emergency Tuition Assistance:** Providing emergency tuition assistance to students whose parents have lost their jobs due to outsourcing or bankruptcy. This tuition would be for the current school year and would be in the form of low-interest state tuition loans from the Merit Trust Fund. These loans would be repaid

six months after they have completed their associate's degree or bachelor's degree, whichever they are seeking. If the student fails to remain a full-time student for more than six months after the loan is granted then repayment will commence at that time.

**Fast Track Admission:** Offering outsourced workers a fast track into community college by requiring that the college wave any GED or high school equivalence requirements for admission. Anyone wishing to qualify must have been out of school for at least four years. Two groups of people may qualify:

- 1) Outsourced workers
- 2) Individuals with an income of 150% of the federal poverty level (roughly \$25,000 for a family of three).

**Job Connector:** Putting in statute the Governor's MI Opportunity Partnership initiative. This will ensure that the program exists as long as it is necessary.

**Lengthening Unemployment Assistance Eligibility:** Increasing the length of time a person could receive unemployment benefits from the current maximum of 26 weeks to 39 weeks.



## How to Contact Senator Leland



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# Town Hall Meeting...

Late in February, I held a series of town hall meetings throughout the district to talk with citizens about their concerns and gather input on pending legislation. Events were held in Inkster/Dearborn Heights and Detroit. I discussed the Governor's proposed budget, which was introduced in early February, gave a quick overview of the budget process, and addressed issues raised by constituents. I would like to thank all the participants. Here is an overview of the critical issues we discussed.

## Bad Contractors

Unscrupulous contractors continue to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers. Constituents shared stories of losing tens of thousands of dollars to contractors who never completed work or simply disappeared. Others explained that, while the appropriate work was completed, contractors left construction materials and waste at homes and in yards.

In the Senate, we are working to establish laws that hold contractors, licensed or not, accountable for their actions. Our legislation would enhance homeowners' ability to protect themselves from predatory contractors and to go after bad contractors once they have wronged a client.

First and foremost, you must make an attempt to protect yourself from predatory

contractors. The best thing you can do to prevent yourself from becoming a victim is to check the credentials of anyone you plan to have work on your home. It is best if you use a contractor who you contact rather than one who approaches you, and you should make sure your contractor is licensed and ask them for past customers with whom you can check their background. If you do experience unfair treatment from a building contractor, file a police report; this will make finding and prosecuting the contractor much easier.

For more information on choosing a home contractor, please visit [www.michigan.gov/dleg](http://www.michigan.gov/dleg) or call my office for a booklet that will guide you through the home remodeling process.

## City Services

Many town hall meeting participants expressed concern over new Detroit trash pick-up rules. Additionally, constituents often contact my office with questions about city services and specific problems in their neighborhoods, like burned-out streetlights or road problems. While there is little we can do in the Senate to fix these local problems, we are happy to approach these issues in terms of casework. We can serve a useful role in connecting you with the appropriate city or county government official and are always willing help you weed through red tape at any level of government.

## Minimum Wage

The minimum wage ballot proposal has garnered a great deal of attention recently. At the town hall meeting, I answered questions about the current ballot proposal initiative and how legislative efforts to raise the minimum wage are shaping up.

Senate Democrats have repeatedly introduced legislation to raise the minimum wage. In a surprise move by the Republicans this month, both houses of the Legislature brought up and passed a bill that, if signed by the Governor, would raise the minimum wage to \$7.40 an hour. Governor Granholm is expected to sign the bill.

A group called Michigan Needs A Raise is working to gather the signatures required to

get a proposal on November's ballot. The proposal would provide a floor for the minimum wage by creating a constitutional amendment that would tie minimum wage to inflation.

I strongly support the legislation that is awaiting the Governor's signature. Raising the minimum wage is vital to Michigan's economic health. It has been eight years since the minimum wage has seen an increase, yet costs have continued to rise. The new minimum wage

will directly benefit approximately 400,000 Michigan workers and, in turn, stimulate our economy.



*State Senator Burton Leland listens attentively to the concerns of his constituents.*





*State Senator Burton Leland (center) and Representative Gabe Leland (left) address important issues.*



*Senator Leland responds to a question asked by one of his constituents during the town hall meeting.*

# Energy

Despite the fact that temperatures have begun to warm, high energy costs and the resulting heating bills are still a problem for many Michigan residents. At the town hall meeting, residents explained that they are still experiencing home heating bills so expensive that they are forced to choose between paying those bills and other necessities. There is not a great deal we can do at the state level to reduce actual costs, but we can

help mitigate the problem by helping you become a smarter energy consumer.

At the next town hall meeting, either a member of the Michigan Public Service Commission or their staff will be on hand to answer your questions about energy costs, the fees attached to energy bills, how to verify these fees, and what the Public Service Commission does and how they are protecting us.



*Representative Gabe Leland and Senator Burton Leland answer questions about energy prices.*

# Governor Introduces Fair and Balanced Budget

Earlier this month, Governor Granholm proposed a budget for the 2007 Fiscal Year, laying out a solid plan for distributing the state's resources in a fair and fiscally responsible manner. As with any budget process, tough choices had to be made, but priorities focused on the issues most important to our quality of life here in Michigan: a better education system, keeping and creating jobs in Michigan, and improving access to quality health care.

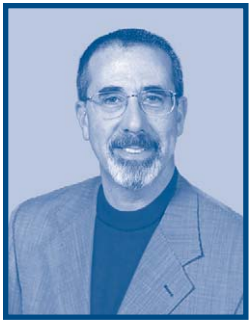
Funding for schools and programs for school-age children saw the biggest increases. Under the Governor's proposal, K-12 public schools will see a jump of \$200 in the per-pupil grant. Additionally, Governor Granholm has also proposed additional funding for after-school tutoring and early education programs. These initiatives are key to giving our children the tools for success, in college and beyond.

Michigan is home to an impressive higher education system, including three world-class research institutions which will play a vital role in Michigan's transformation to a world leader in the 21st Century economy. The good-paying, sustainable jobs of tomorrow will require education beyond high school. That's why higher education also saw one of this year's few budget increases. First, all universities will receive a 2% increase for operations. Additionally, a new funding formula will enhance cutting-edge research at the University of Michigan, Michigan State, and Wayne State to encourage high-level technological development in Michigan businesses.

As we work to strengthen our economy, expanding access to health care for all Michigan citizens is key to keeping down everyone's health care costs. Governor Granholm has proposed

a plan that will bring affordable, quality health care to over half of a million people. A financial partnership with the federal government will fund the program, which will help self-employed workers, small businesses, and other working uninsured. Additionally, we will continue to fund the MI-Child program which covers 34,000 children.

Making education, at all levels, our top priority will foster job growth and expand opportunity for all Michigan citizens. The proposed budget gives Michigan schools the tools to strengthen our K-12 education programs and focuses our higher education system on helping Michigan create the most educated workforce in the nation, all without raising general taxes.



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# Senator Leland Fights to Protect Drinking Water Quality

Senator Leland remains committed to consumer protection and the quality-of-life issues that affect Michigan citizens on a daily basis. Recently, Senate Democrats put forth a package of proposals that would increase food safety and guarantee drinking water quality.

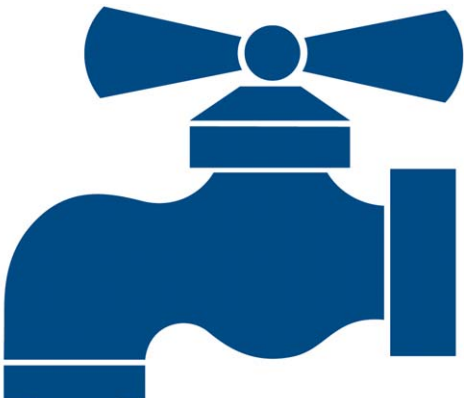
The new legislative package calls for adequate oversight for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), also known as corporate animal factories. Every year, these corporate animal factories put smaller family farms and communities at risk by generating massive amounts of pollution, contaminating Michigan’s air and water with animal waste and toxic by-products.

Currently, there is no legal recourse against a company that impedes a farmer or rural

resident’s ability to work and live. The waste produced by these corporate animal factories can be unbearable to those in surrounding areas, and a bill sponsored by Senator Leland would hold them accountable for their actions.

Unmanaged livestock production is one of the biggest threats to community health in Michigan, yet corporate factory farms are not subject to the Clean Water Act, the federal rules and regulations to which all other factories must adhere. The clay-lined lagoons that store manure at corporate farms can be expected to leak up to several thousand gallons of excrement per acre per day, contaminating drinking water, spreading disease, and affecting air quality for miles.

Corporate animal factories aren’t just a problem for the



communities where they exist. They affect the water supply, food quality, and recreation areas of all Michigan residents. Sen. Leland remains committed to doing everything he can to give Michigan residents a guarantee that they can depend on safe and clean water.

# Michigan Pension Rights Project Seeking Lost Recipients

The Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) is a federal organization dedicated to providing retirement benefits to employees of companies whose own retirement benefits have become insolvent. However, many retirees do not realize they are eligible for these benefits. The Michigan Pension Rights

Project has embarked on a program to locate and assist these citizens who are owed retirement benefits by the PBGC.

A number of past employees not collecting their pensions live or lived in the Detroit area. The PBGC has made a list of the prospective beneficiaries available on their “Pension Search

Directory” website at **[www.pbgc.gov](http://www.pbgc.gov)**. If you think you may be eligible for a pension through PBGC, check this list for your name. If you need additional assistance or do not have Internet access, please call Senator Leland’s Lansing office.